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PEACE IN CENTRAL AMERICA?

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INTRODUCTION

In early January 1983 the foreign ministers of Panama, Colombia, Venezuela and Mexico met on the Panamanian island of Contadora to discuss the deteriorating situation in Central America. The region, they agreed, had become a powder-keg. Anti-government forces on Nicaragua's borders were growing rapidly, the civil war in El Salvador threatened to spill over its borders, and a counter-insurgency campaign of unprecedented scope had been launched in Guatemala. Tensions between Honduras and Nicaragua increased as border incidents multiplied. The superpowers were becoming deeply involved in these conflicts: observers spoke in ominous terms about a possible regional war, about direct US intervention, and about the "deadly connection" between the crisis in Central America and the rising crescendo of superpower confrontation.

The struggles in Central America* are struggles over power, social justice and national self-determination. They are conflicts among the forces of conservatism, the forces of reform and the forces of radical change. They have led to pervasive militarization, over one hundred thousand deaths, and over one million refugees and displaced people in the region. Since none of the parties is likely to win a decisive military victory, further militarization and bloodshed are likely unless the Contadora initiative bears fruit soon.

EL SALVADOR

Since 1984, El Salvador has been governed by José Napoleon Duarte of the Christian Democratic party (PCD). President Duarte has been a firm ally of the

United States since he headed El Salvador's civilian-military junta from 1980 to 1982. As the architect of the country's "centrist option," President Duarte announced his intentions to bring the military under civilian control, eliminate human rights abuses, reform the judiciary, build a democratic political system and implement moderate economic reforms. He also promised to negotiate with the armed opposition alliance in order to end the civil war which has been raging since 1979.

Certain steps have been taken to attain these goals. The 1984 presidential and the 1985 legislative and mayoral elections were administered with greater fairness and efficiency than the election of 1982, although the absence of participation by the parties of the Left cast doubt on the legitimacy of the results.

Other major reforms attempted by President Duarte have faced immense obstacles. Land reforms were stalled before reaching the stage of significant redistribution. Labour unions have been allowed to organize, but the exercise of workers' rights has been seriously hampered by official and unofficial repression. Negotiations with the armed opposition took place in the fall of 1984 but no agreement was reached and the talks have not been resumed.

Certain judicial reforms have been implemented, but these have had little impact on the human rights situation in the country. Indeed, as a 1985 report by the UN Commission on Human Rights' Special Rapporteur argued, human rights violations by official and unofficial agencies had decreased but remained widespread.¹

Some critics of the Duarte government have argued that the power and political extremism of the military, as well as the influence of those landowner and business groups which have historically resisted any reforms that might jeopardize their interests, have together prevailed over reformist elements in the Duarte Government and have succeeded in conserving existing social and economic structures.

*This paper focusses on El Salvador and Nicaragua, although it also touches on the situations in Guatemala, Honduras and Costa Rica as they affect the prospects for peace in Central America.



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Other observers have drawn attention to the connection between the Duarte Government's economic, military and diplomatic dependence on the United States, the power of the military, and the failure of the PCD's reform attempts.²

The main opposition to the Duarte government has come from the FDR-FMLN. The FDR, the Democratic Revolutionary Front, is a coalition of popular organizations (political parties of the Left, peasant federations, labour unions, community organizations, student and academic organizations) which emerged after the breakdown of official political institutions in the mid-1970s. The FMLN, the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front, is a coalition of five guerrilla armies. The FDR-FMLN was formed in 1980 on the basis of links, forged in the 1970's, among popular organizations, political parties of the Left and the guerrilla armies described above. Since the leaders of the FDR are based in Mexico City, *de facto* revolutionary leadership is now exercised by the FMLN.

The FDR-FMLN has been fighting since 1980 to overthrow the Salvadorean government. It has promised that its victory would be followed by basic economic reforms, the exercise of popular power within a legal and democratic framework, and a movement towards non-alignment in international affairs.

The continuing stalemate of the war prompted the FMLN to issue a new call for national dialogue in November 1985. The government wants the FMLN to lay down its arms and to participate in the next election. The FMLN rejects the legitimacy of the 1984 and 1985 elections, and claims that military surrender would be suicidal given the government's human rights record and the fact that it would then have a monopoly of force. The FMLN demands an immediate end to US military assistance and wants to see its own armed forces and leaders incorporated into a reorganized military and political system. These conditions are unacceptable to the current government and to the Military High Command.

NICARAGUA

In July 1979, the dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza was overthrown by a broad popular uprising led by the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). The FSLN was formed in the early 1960s, fought a long guerrilla war against the Somoza regime, and is currently the governing party in the Nicaraguan political system.

Since 1979, the FSLN campaign to extend basic social services to the rural and urban poor has led to impressive declines in the rates of illiteracy, infant mortality and malnutrition. In both social and eco-

nomic policy, the goal has been to devise practical policies within the framework of a mixed economy with public sector leadership.

The FSLN has also worked to build political structures which will represent the interests of those sectors historically excluded from power. Workers and peasants have been encouraged to form unions, women to form a national organization, and slum dwellers to promote their interests. The FSLN has maintained control over the creation and operation of the new defence and internal security forces. While this tendency towards one-party dominance has received much popular support, it has also created opposition among professional, business and other groups with different interests. Elections held in 1984 reflected these tensions. Many observers felt that they were fairly administered and that their results (an FSLN victory with two-thirds of the vote) genuinely represented the public mood at the time.³ Addressing the Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence, External Affairs Minister Joe Clark remarked: "There can be no doubt, on election day, the people of Nicaragua expressed a very strong support for the Sandinista government." Some critics have contested this judgement.⁴

In order to safeguard Nicaragua's security, the government organized, trained and supplied a new army. It planned to build the force with advice from Cuba and supplies from the West. Repeated attempts were made to procure arms from the United States and other Western suppliers, but these attempts were largely unsuccessful.⁵ France signed an arms deal with Nicaragua in 1981 but, because of intense pressure from Washington, it refused to undertake new commitments. Nicaragua began to rely on the Soviet Union and its allies for defence needs. Accordingly, the volume of Soviet supplies increased dramatically and has grown steadily since 1982, undermining the credibility of Nicaragua's commitment to non-alignment.

Social tensions in Nicaragua have increased as a result of economic decline, the imposition of compulsory military service and the occurrence of some human rights violations. Internal security legislation and practices tend to be heavy-handed; the press is often censored and the most critical opposition newspaper was recently closed down. The Miskito people, an indigenous community in north-eastern Nicaragua, were victims of government repression in 1981-82, and pro-Sandinista factions have used intimidation tactics against some opposition groups.⁶

According to supporters of the Nicaraguan Revolution, these violations cannot be condoned, but they must be recognized as authoritarian tendencies in a regime that is otherwise respectful of basic human rights. Mass killings, assassination, kidnap-

ping, air attacks on civilian communities and other repressive techniques regularly employed by both official and unofficial forces in El Salvador and Guatemala do not occur in Nicaragua.

Opposition to the Sandinista government has come from several quarters. The six other political parties which participated in the 1984 elections have led a spirited opposition to certain FSLN policies. They have influenced the drafting of legislation and would like to see changes in some of the regime's political practices, but they have pledged their support for the basic structures of the Nicaraguan Revolution.

This is not the case with the organization representing big business interests, the leaders of the Catholic Church, the four parties that boycotted the election, one newspaper (*La Prensa*) and one small labour federation, which all have more fundamental differences with the government. These organizations have led an intense anti-government campaign and have refused to condemn the armed groups who are attempting to overthrow the Sandinista regime.

These armies, referred to as *contras*, are led by the United Nicaraguan Opposition (UNO). Not all *contras* belong to the UNO, but this organization is by far the most influential force in the armed opposition. The UNO is nominally led by moderate civilian politicians such as Arturo Cruz and Alfonso Robelo, but effective control rests with military leaders such as Enrique Bermudez, the former military attaché to Washington for the Somoza regime. The high command and the officer corps are made up largely of former members of Somoza's National Guard. Under the old regime, as reported by Amnesty International and Americas Watch, these men planned and implemented a campaign of violence outstanding for its brutality even by Central American standards. They continue to be responsible for systematic human rights violations as *contra* leaders today.⁷

The *contras*' past and present record, combined with the fact that they have had little success as a military force since 1985, make it unlikely that the government will agree to negotiations with them, as Washington has been urging.

EXTERNAL POWERS

There are several outside powers involved in Central America's military-security affairs, but the most important external actors are the Soviet Union, Cuba and the United States.

The Soviet Union

The Soviet Union has no important historical ties to Central America, nor does it appear to view the region as a core interest. But it faces some difficult choices. On the one hand, it has obvious ideological

affinities with many Central American revolutionaries. Moreover, support for "national liberation" movements is popular in the Third World and adds to Soviet prestige. On the other hand, there is little to be gained from establishing a military presence in Central America (given existing military installations in Cuba), and there is much to be lost in relations with the US, still the chief concern of Soviet foreign policy. The pursuit of too radical a course in Latin America would also threaten Soviet relations with key Latin American governments, such as Mexico, which are now relatively good.⁸

This mix of factors, combined with limited force projection capabilities in the region, have shaped the USSR's cautious and restrained policy towards Central America. The Soviet Union has declared its support for the Contadora Initiative. It has provided considerable support to the Nicaraguan Government, including substantial relief and development assistance, and major supplies of petroleum.

The Soviet Union and its allies have also become Nicaragua's main arms suppliers. In 1979 Nicaragua received \$5 million of defensive arms from Warsaw Pact countries. Arms transfers increased slightly in 1980 (850 metric tons) and 1981 (900 metric tons). In 1982, as *contra* attacks and border tensions increased, and as it became evident that no arms would be forthcoming from the West, the scale of these military supplies changed dramatically. According to the US Department of State, shipments increased to 6,700 tons in 1982, 14,000 tons in 1983 and 18,000 tons in 1984. Warsaw Pact countries have also sent military advisers to Nicaragua. Although the exact numbers are in dispute, it seems that there have been about 100 Soviet and East European advisers in the country since 1983.⁹

Cuba

Cuba is the major external socialist actor in Central America. Its commitment to revolutionary change in the region flows from its world view and its own strategic interests. Cuba has provided advice, some training and limited material support to the Salvadorean FMLN, although this support has decreased sharply since 1981. It is in Nicaragua that the Cuban presence is most pronounced.

Nicaragua has received a significant amount of assistance from Cuba in the fields of health, education, development, military and security planning assistance. The exact number of Cuban military advisers in Nicaragua is unknown: it lies somewhere between the official Nicaraguan figure of 500 and estimates of 3,000 by certain Western sources.¹⁰

The United States

The United States has been the preponderant power in Central America since the turn of the century. Its presence grew rapidly with the expansion of US investment, the construction of the Panama Canal, and its numerous military interventions in Nicaragua from 1909 to 1933. American investment, trade and aid have produced local benefits, but critics argue that the pattern of US economic relations with the region has also tended to aggravate conditions which perpetuate inequality and political authoritarianism. Moreover, the US role in the overthrow of the reformist Arbenz government in Guatemala in 1954 and its sometimes tacit, sometimes overt support for dictators such as Somoza have helped perpetuate underdevelopment, anti-American sentiments and demands for fundamental change in the region.

When these demands led to the overthrow of Somoza and the eruption of civil war in El Salvador in 1979, the Carter Administration attempted to accommodate but contain the Nicaraguan revolution while promoting moderate reform and putting a brake on the revolutionary process in El Salvador.

The Reagan Administration has taken a much bolder stand on the crisis in Central America. The President and his officials have argued that widespread misery and repression gave rise to legitimate demands for change in Central America, but these demands have been transformed into communist revolutions by Cuban and Soviet interference. "Central America is a region of great importance to the United States," argued the President in 1984, "and it has become the stage for a bold attempt by the Soviet Union, Cuba and Nicaragua to install communism by force throughout the hemisphere."¹¹

These developments, according to the Administration, threaten both the welfare of Central Americans and the security of the United States. They threaten the people of Central America because they will lead to totalitarian and expansionist regimes. They threaten the United States because they could create a refugee crisis of unmanageable proportions, endanger the sea lanes of the Caribbean, force the US to divert defence resources to the protection of its southern borders and, finally, because their victory would undermine US credibility worldwide. For all these reasons, the Kissinger Commission argued, revolutionary forces in the region must be opposed.¹²

Economic, diplomatic, military and public relations instruments have been used by Washington to fight the forces of revolution. In the economic realm, the Reagan Administration has implemented the Caribbean Basin Initiative, a one-way free trade scheme designed to reactivate the region's econo-

mies. The US has increased aid flows to the region and, in the fall of 1985, announced the implementation of the Central America Democracy, Peace and Development Initiative, a comprehensive strategy for economic recovery in the region. Nicaragua has been excluded from these schemes. The US government has also used its influence in multilateral banks to curtail lending to Nicaragua. The Reagan Administration forced a reduction of US-Nicaraguan trade throughout its first term in office, a policy that was expanded into a full embargo on all economic relations in March 1985.

In the realm of politics and diplomacy, Washington has pressed for elections in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. It has given verbal support to the concept of dialogue within El Salvador, but has backed the Duarte government's fundamental opposition to any power-sharing arrangement with the FDR-FMLN. Washington has also repeatedly pressed for negotiations between Managua and the *contras*, making these talks a precondition for ceasing to support the *contras* and for resuming direct talks with the Nicaraguan government. It entered into bilateral talks with Managua in 1984, but unilaterally called off those discussions in 1985. Finally, while it rejected earlier Mexican and Venezuelan mediation proposals, the Administration has officially supported the Contadora process. Many officials from the Contadora countries have, however, expressed the view that the military dimensions of Washington's policy in the region have undermined the Contadora process.

Indeed, US military presence in Central America has grown dramatically during the 1980s. Military assistance to the region (excluding Nicaragua) has been increased from \$44.4 million in 1981 to \$121.2 million in 1983 and to \$225.3 million in 1985. The US provided \$574 million in military assistance to the region in the 1980-84 period, an amount 40% higher (based on the Administration's own estimates) than that provided by all Soviet bloc countries to Nicaragua in the same interval. If the economic support funds that often complement military assistance are included, these figures are much higher: \$89.3 million in 1981, \$474.2 million in 1983 and \$830.3 in 1985.¹³

In addition, US advisers have overseen the restructuring of military operations in El Salvador and have trained Salvadoran, Honduran and Costa Rican officers and troops to upgrade their planning and field performance. The US also has conducted several large-scale military exercises in Honduras and naval exercises off Nicaragua's coasts, and has built a military infrastructure in Honduras, where an average of 1,700 US troops have been stationed since 1983.¹⁴

This build-up appears to go beyond the official US commitment to help its friends defend themselves against aggression. Indeed, the International Institute for Strategic Studies has suggested that the purpose of the expanded US presence in Honduras "has been to upgrade the military infrastructure . . . and lay the groundwork for rapid and efficient intervention in the area, should it be considered unavoidable."¹⁵ Even if US forces do not invade Nicaragua, their continued presence in Honduras deters Nicaraguan forces from launching large cross-border raids against *contra* camps and serves to keep Nicaragua in a state of high mobilization.

The United States has also provided extensive support to the armed Nicaraguan opposition. Despite difficulties in securing congressional approval for support to the *contras*, the Administration has managed to provide over \$100 million in official assistance to the guerrillas between 1981 and 1985. The *contras* have also received training and extensive public relations support from US agencies. Finally, the CIA has taken an active role in the sabotage of Nicaraguan infrastructure, assisting the mining of three harbours and attacks on Nicaraguan oil facilities in 1983 and 1984. Nicaragua filed suit at the International Court of Justice on this matter, but on 6 April 1984, the Administration announced that the US would not recognize the Court's jurisdiction for two years in cases involving Central America. In October 1985 Washington terminated its adherence to the general compulsory jurisdiction of the ICJ, effectively extending the 1984 decision to similar cases which could arise in the future.

THE EFFECTS OF WAR

The conflicts between the forces of conservatism and the forces of radical change have had a profoundly disruptive impact on the societies of Central America. As indicated in Table 1, the regular forces and the paramilitary establishments in each country have been significantly expanded. Armed opposition forces in both El Salvador and Nicaragua have grown in size and in combat capability. Vast civil defence networks have been formed. New weapons systems for both counter-insurgency and conventional warfare have been introduced into the region. Even Costa Rica, a country that eliminated its army in 1949, has begun to build up and re-arm its paramilitary forces. In order to finance these build-ups, military expenditures have been increased to unprecedented levels in each country.

Over 55,000 people have died from the conflict in El Salvador since 1979. In Nicaragua, the war has resulted in 12,000 deaths since 1981, over and above the 35,000 people who died during the battles to overthrow the Somoza dictatorship. In Guatemala, reports indicate that over 70,000 people have fallen victim to political violence since 1978.¹⁶ Repression and war have also provided a refugee problem of crisis proportions in the region.

These wars have also been highly counter-productive from a diplomatic standpoint. The US-led arms boycott and the embargo have driven Nicaragua towards a dependence on the socialist countries that it claims it wished to avoid. Soviet-bloc support has reduced the incentives for the FSLN to moderate its policies, just as US support for the

TABLE 1

The Militarization of Central America (m = US \$ million; NA = not applicable)

| | | El Salvador | Nicaragua | Honduras | Guatemala | Costa Rica |
|----------------------|------|-------------|------------|----------|-----------|------------|
| Armed Forces | 1978 | 7,130 | 7,100 | 14,200 | 14,270 | NA |
| | 1981 | 9,850 | 6,700 | 11,200 | 15,050 | NA |
| | 1985 | 41,650 | 62,850 | 23,000 | 31,700 | NA |
| Para-military | 1978 | 3,000 | 4,000 | 3,000 | 3,000 | 5,000 |
| | 1981 | 7,000 | 8,000 | 3,000 | 3,000 | 5,000 |
| | 1985 | 11,000 | 5,000 | 5,000 | 11,600 | 8,000 |
| Armed militia | 1985 | 70,000 | 40,000 | NA | 15,000 | NA |
| Defence Expenditures | 1977 | 34m | 51m | 30m | 66m | 12m |
| | 1981 | 123m | 158m | 45m | 70m | 14m |
| | 1984 | 480m | 348m(1983) | 90m | 180m | 20m |

Sources: International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1978/79*, London, 1978; *ibid.* 1981, 1985. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers 1985*, Washington, 1985. Council on Hemispheric Affairs, *The Military Balance in Central America*, COHA, Washington, 1985.

Salvadoran counter-insurgency war has strengthened anti-reformist elements within that country. Militarization and conflict have eroded trust between the states in the region, and have made confidence-building an extremely difficult task. Since a negotiated settlement remains elusive, and neither side is capable of defending the other militarily, the prospects for protracted or escalated conflict remain very high.

THE CONTADORA INITIATIVE

The Contadora nations have consistently argued that military approaches to the region's conflicts are counter-productive. "The use of force," noted the group in the *Cancun Declaration* of 19 July 1983,

is an approach that does not dissolve but aggravates the underlying tensions. Peace in Central America can become a reality only in so far (sic) as respect is shown for the basic principles of coexistence among nations: non-intervention; self-determination; sovereign equality of states; co-operation for economic and social development; peaceful settlement of disputes; and free and authentic expression of the popular will.

During 1983 and 1984 the Contadora ministers and several teams of experts worked in consultation with the Central American governments to devise a comprehensive framework for regional conflict resolution. On 7 September 1984, the group presented the heads of the Central American states with the Contadora Act for Peace and Cooperation in Central America. The Act also included a Protocol which, if signed by Washington, would have bound the US to respect the agreement. The key commitments of the 1984 Act were:

- a halt to the arms race in all its forms;
- the launching of a process for negotiated arms reductions;
- the cessation of all support, including sanctuary, to irregular forces;
- the prohibition of international military manoeuvres;
- the elimination of foreign military bases and schools, and no authorization of new foreign military facilities;
- the immediate promotion of national reconciliation processes;
- the establishment of representative and pluralistic political systems guaranteeing the effective organized participation of all social sectors in decision-making.

The Act was initially well received by all five Central American governments and by Washington. On 21 September Nicaragua announced that it would accept the treaty without revisions. Costa Rica, Honduras and El Salvador announced that they had reservations about the draft. They objected to the clauses on the withdrawal of foreign military bases and advisers, and expressed concerns about the weakness of the verification measures. One month later, these countries presented a counterdraft which did not include a prohibition on US military exercises or military installations in the region.

Canada's view of the situation in Central America has always been similar to that of the Contadora countries themselves. In January 1985, at the request of the Contadora ambassadors, Canada presented the group with a document outlining ways in which the 1984 draft treaty could be improved. The Government suggested that the framework for financing control and verification operations be clarified, that the Central American states be brought onto the Commission which was to oversee the operations, and that the Commission's freedom of movement and access to communications media be guaranteed. It also recommended that a sponsoring political institution (such as the UN Security Council) was desirable and that a time limit be established for the Commission's mandate. Several of these suggestions were incorporated into the 1985 draft.

On 12 September 1985, after another year of difficult negotiations and the near collapse of the process, a second Act was presented to the Central American heads of state. The new draft contained improved guidelines for national reconciliation as well as for control and verification. Three new protocols were added to lay the legal basis for involvement by external powers in enforcing the treaty. The treaty appeared to meet the Reagan Administration's four basic demands with respect to Nicaragua, namely the cessation of external subversion, the reduction of military capabilities, the reduction of military ties to socialist countries, and the establishment of genuine pluralism.¹⁷

The 1985 draft did not, however, meet key Nicaraguan concerns. The treaty would have sanctioned US military exercises in the region (as suggested by the 1984 counterdraft) and would have forced Nicaragua to send home most of its non-military advisers in addition to its foreign security personnel. Most significant, however, was the absence of guarantees binding the United States to the agreement: without an explicit US commitment to non-aggression (both direct and indirect), the Nicaraguan Government argued that its security could not be safeguarded. Negotiations were pursued on

these matters for over two months, but when a consensus failed to emerge, the Contadora talks were suspended.

The process was revived in January 1986 at a meeting of the Contadora group and the new Contadora Support group composed of Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina and Peru. The groups released the Caraballeda Message which called for, *inter alia*, an end to external support for unconventional forces, a suspension of all international military manoeuvres and the resumption of US-Nicaraguan talks.

On 14 January the five Central American governments, meeting at the inauguration of President Cerezo in Guatemala, released a joint declaration of support for the Caraballeda Message. In February the foreign ministers of the Contadora and Support Group countries met with US officials in Washington in an attempt to dissuade the Administration from pressing for further aid to the *contras*. Later that month the eight Latin American foreign ministers released a statement at their meeting in Uruguay arguing that "the end to the irregular forces and insurrectionary movements in the countries of the region is imperative for establishing international law and order." (Punta del Este Communiqué, 28 February 1986.)

On 12 March the deputy foreign ministers of Nicaragua and Costa Rica agreed to establish a border monitoring mechanism and to improve bilateral relations. Since then representatives from the five Central American countries have met on several occasions alone and with their Contadora and Support group counterparts in an attempt to sign the treaty by 6 June. Agreement on the few outstanding items was not reached by that date, but on 7 June the Contadora countries presented the five Central American governments with a third draft treaty. This draft strengthened provisions prohibiting international military manoeuvres in the region and offered new guidelines for arms reductions. On 21 June Nicaragua announced its support for the revised draft while El Salvador, Honduras and Costa Rica rejected it. The Salvadorean government called for the restructuring or the dismantling of the Contadora group.

PROSPECTS FOR PEACE

The prospects for peace in Central America remain poor. Arguing that the Nicaraguan government would not negotiate unless it was under greater pressure to do so, the Reagan Administration has pressed ahead in its campaign for military assistance to the *contras*. On 25 June 1986 the House of Representatives narrowly voted in favour of extending another \$100 million in aid to those forces,

a decision subsequently supported by the Senate. The Sandinista government shows no sign of yielding to such pressure, nor of changing its approach to opposition elements within the country.

On 27 June the International Court of Justice handed down its judgement on the US-Nicaraguan case. The Court rejected the argument of collective self-defence used by the Reagan Administration to justify its policies against Nicaragua. It decided that the US,

by training, arming, equipping, financing and supplying the *contra* forces or otherwise encouraging, supporting and aiding military or paramilitary activities in and against the Republic of Nicaragua, has acted, against the Republic of Nicaragua, in breach of its obligation under customary international law not to intervene in the affairs of another state.

The Court also decided that the US was under obligation to cease these acts and to make reparations to Nicaragua for the breaches of law identified in the judgement. The US State Department rejected the ruling on the grounds that the Court is not competent to rule on such military matters.

Emboldened by the momentum of the Congressional vote, the Administration is unlikely to cease supporting the *contras* or to pressure its Central American allies to sign the latest Contadora draft. Nicaragua, in turn, is unlikely to sign any treaty requiring it to send home foreign military advisers and reduce the size of its armed forces in the current atmosphere.

In spite of these and other obstacles, Canada still regards the Contadora process as the most promising framework for peace in the region. In July 1986, Mr. Clark sent this message to the countries of the Contadora Group and the Lima Support Group:

I am deeply concerned, as I know you must be, that so much dedicated effort directed to creating an atmosphere and finding a formula for peaceful reconciliation in Central America has not yet achieved success. I wish to assure you that the Government of Canada maintains its support for the Contadora Initiative and its respect for the skill and energy with which you have pursued the search for peace and cooperation.

I fear, as I know that you do, the increased militarization and other dangers that would ensue if Contadora is dismantled and dialogue obstructed.¹⁸

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